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CHAMPLAIN NOT CARTIER

MADE THE FIRST REFERENCE TO NIAGARA FALLS IN LITERATURE

BY
PETER A PORTER

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THE FIRST REFERENCE TO NIAGARA FALLS IN LITERATURE

THE statement that Jacques Cartier, in 1535, was the first white man to hear about the Falls of Niagara, and to make reference to them, has often been printed: and never, so far as I know, has it been controverted.

Cartier, on his second voyage to Canada, in that year, ascended the St. Lawrence to Hochelaga, now Montreal.

Marc Lescarbot's Histoire de la Nouvelle France describes Cartier's voyages. This work was first published in 1609, at Paris, and on page 381 is found the frequently quoted reference that has been regarded as the first mention of Niagara Falls in literature.

The substance of this reference, as given by O. H. Marshall, in "The Niagara Frontier" is as follows:

> "He [Cartier] was told, that after ascending many leagues among rapids and waterfalls he would reach a lake, one hundred and fifty leagues long and forty or fifty broad, at the western extremity of which the waters were wholesome and the winters mild; that a river emptied into it from the south, which had its source in the country of the Iroquois; that beyond this lake he would find a cataract and portage; then another lake about equal to the former, which they had never explored; and still further on, a sea, the western shores of which they had never seen, nor had they heard of any one who had.
>
> "This is the earliest historical notice of our great Lake Region."

Marshall's Historical writings Albany, 1887 p. 275 and 276

Lescarbot p. 381

This passage from Marshall has often been quoted; and all the writers on the history of this Region have placed Cartier's name first in the Bibliography of Niagara; and have made the quotation from Lescarbot (given below on page 8) the starting point of Niagara's printed history.

I have, myself, used these statements and have quoted them, verifying their general accuracy from the reference to Lescarbot.

But a careful reading of Lescarbot's book shows clearly that in this part of his work he is only quoting literally from Champlain's "Des Sauvages," (which was first published in 1604, five years before Lescarbot's book appeared) and that Lescarbot so states explicitly.

Lescarbot makes three references to Niagara Falls, one on page 379, another on page 381, and still another on page 383; but each one of the three is a literal quotation from Champlain's "Des Sauvages"; so the descriptions are not Cartier's at all.

Hence the date of the first reference to Niagara must be changed from 1535 to 1604, and the honor of being the first white man to tell anything whatsover about it, must be transferred to Champlain.

Here are the proofs of this.

I have, and in this article I quote from, the original edition of Lescarbot's Histoire de la Nouvelle France (Paris, 1609).

I do not possess a copy of the original edition (Paris, 1604) of Champlain's "Des Sauvages." Very, very few persons or libraries do. So I quote from the 6-vol. edition (Quebec, 1870) of Champlain's works, edited by the Abbé Laverdière; "Des Sauvages" being in Vol. II.

Lescarbot's work is divided into three books.

Book two (Livre Deuxieme) has 48 chapters. The "Summary of the Chapters" of this book reads:

Translation and Italics mine

> "In this book are described the voyages and navigations of Captain Jacques Cartier; and a voyage made by Jehan Francois de la Roque Sieur de Roberval, under King Francois I. is incidentally referred to. Also the most recent discoveries of Sieurs de Monts and de Poutrincourt; together with the voyages of Sieur Marquis de la Roche, *and of Sieur Champlain:* under the glorious reign of our King, Henry IIII."

Chapter 1, gives a summary of Cartier's two first voyages to Canada. Chapters 2–5, inclusive, give the history of Cartier's first voyage (1534). Chapters 6–8, inclusive, give part of the history of Cartier's second voyage (1535) following Cartier's own description and adding to it. Chapters 9–11, inclusive, give part of Champlain's voyage in 1603, following his descriptions in Chapters 1–5½ of his "Des Sauvages." Chapters 12–18, inclusive, give more of Cartier's 1535 voyage, following his own description and adding to it. Chapters 19–21, inclusive, give more of Champlain's 1603 voyage, quoted almost exactly, from middle of Chapter 5 to the end of chapter 9, of his "Des Sauvages." Chapters 22–27 inclusive, give the balance of the history of Cartier's 1535–6 voyage, following his own description. Chapters 28–48, inclusive, tell of other French voyages, to Canada, etc.

Cartier's own description of his second voyage to Canada, (1535–36), was published in Paris in 1545, under the title

> "BRIEF RECIT, & fuccincte narration, de la nauigation faicte es yfles de Canada, Hochelage & Saguenay & autres, auec particulieres meurs, langaige, & cerimonies des habitans d'icelles: fort delectable à veoir."

And Cartier therein has no reference to Niagara Falls, and but a very slight one to our Lake Region.

It is the basis of Lescarbot's description of Cartier's second voyage as above. It is a little volume of 48 sheets, 8 vo., only one copy being known to exist. It was reprinted, page for page, in Paris, in 1863, by Tross.

M. D'Avezac in his introduction to that reprint, referring to the original edition of Cartier's book, says:

Page XVI.

> "No one knows of any other publication of it excepting Lescarbot in his 'History of New France' (Book III. chapters 5–8, 12–18 and 22–27), where Cartier's voyage is pieced out by and intermingled with, non-consecutive fragments of Champlain's voyage."

Translation mine

NOTE—In the above quotation Book III. should have read Book II. There are only 26 chapters in Book III. The context proves that D'Avezac meant Book II.

Note mine

Lescarbot ed. 1609, Chap. XIX., Book II., on page 365, is entitled:

> "*Voyage du Sieur Châplein depuis le Port de Saincte Croix juſques au Saut de la grande riviere, où ſont remarquées les rivieres, iles, & autres choſes qu'il a découvertes audit voyage: & particulierement la riviere, & le peuple, & le païs des* Iroquois."

And on page 366 in said Chapter Lescarbot says:

Translation mine

> "Still in a voyage of some 200 leagues between St. Croix and the above mentioned fall, the said ~~La Salle~~ has noticed some things which Cartier has not observed. Let us therefore hear what he [Champlain] says about his voyage."

Champlain

Without noting the quotation which follows, word for word, (for it is very long, occupying Chapters XIX., XX. and XXI. of Lescarbot's book, and there are some slight changes in the spelling and orthography, and one or two short abridgments and additions), let me say that Lescarbot's Histoire de la Nouvelle France, 1609 ed., from the middle of page 366, in Chapter XIX., near the beginning thereof, to the end of Chapter XXI., on page 385, is an almost exact copy of Champlain's "Des Sauvages," from top of page 28 in Chapter VI., to end of Chapter IX. on page 48, ed. 1870, Vol. II.; as per Lescarbot's intention, expressed above, to quote him. But I quote the three references in Chapters XX. and XXI. of Book II., in Lescarbot, that refer to Niagara Falls, and seriatim I compare each one with Champlain's "Des Sauvages," showing them to be mere quotations therefrom.

QUOTATION No. 1

In Chapter XX., on page 379, Lescarbot, in narrating what "the savages who were with us told us," says:

Lac

> "Et puis ils viennent dedans vn lac qui peut tenir quelques quatre-vingts lieuës de long, où il y a quantité d'iles, & qu'au bout d'icelui l'eau y eſt falubre, & l'hiver doux. A la fin dudit lac ilz paſſent vn faut, qui eſt quelque

Niagara Falls

Saut

peu élevé, ou il y a peu d'eau, laquelle deſcend: là ilz portent leurs canots par terre environ vn quart de lieuë pour paſſer ce ſaut De là entrent dans vn autre lac qui peut tenir quelques ſoixante lieuës de long, & que l'eau en eſt fort ſalubre: eſtans à la fin ils viennent à vn détroit qui contient deux lieuës de large, & va aſſez avant dans les terres: qu'ilz n'avoient point paſſé plus outre, & n'avoient veu la fin d'vn lac qui eſt à quelques quinze ou ſeize lieuës d'ou ils ont eſté, ni que ceux qui leur avoient dit euſſent veu homme qui l'euſt veu."

Lac

Détroit

Lac infini

Now compare with the above Champlain's "Des Sauvages," in Chapter VIII., Vol. II., page 42, where he tells "what two savages who were with us related."

"Et puis ils viennent dedans vn lac qui peut tenir quelques 80. lieuës de long, où il y a quantité d'iſles; & que au bout d'iceluy l'eau y eſt ſalubre & l'hyuer doux. A la fin dudit lac, ils paſſent vn ſault qui eſt quelque peu éleué, où il y a peu d'eau, laquelle deſcend. Là, ils portent leurs canots par terre enuiron vn quart de lieuë pour paſſer ce ſault; de là entrent dans vn autre lac qui peut tenir quelques ſoixante lieuës de long, & que l'eau en eſt fort ſalubre. Eſtant à la fin ils viennent à vn deſtroict qui contient deux lieuës de large, & va aſſez auant dans les terres. Qu'ils n'auoient point paſſé plus outre, & n'auoient veu la fin d'vn lac qui eſt à quelques quinze ou ſeize lieuës d'où ils ſont eſté, ny que ceux qui leur auoient dict euſſent veu homme qui le l'euſt veu."

Le lac Ontario

La chute de Niagara

Niagara Falls

Le lac Erie

La riviére du Détroit

Le lac Huron

Translation of the two quotations above, both being the same, from Publications of the Prince Society, Champlain's Voyages, Boston, Vol. I., page 271.

"Then they come to a lake ſome eighty leagues long, with a great many iſlands; the water at its extremity being freſh and the winter mild. At the end of this lake they paſs a fall,

Lake Ontario

Niagara Falls

Niagara Falls

Lake Erie

Detroit River

Lake Huron

ſomewhat high and with but little water flowing over. Here they carry their canoes overland about a quarter of a league, in order to paſs the fall, afterwards entering another lake ſome ſixty leagues long, and containing very good water. Having reached the end, they come to a ſtrait two leagues broad and extending a conſiderable diſtance into the interior. They ſaid they had never gone any farther, nor ſeen the end of a lake ſome fifteen or ſixteen leagues diſtant from where they had been, and that thoſe relating this to them had not ſeen any one who had ſeen it."

QUOTATION No. 2

Lescarbot in Chapter XXI., on page 381, in narrating "what two or three Algonquins related" says:

Lac.

Riviere des Algoumequins vers le Nort.

Riviere venant des Iroquois.

Niagara Falls

Saut.

Grand lac & infini.

"Puis viennent dedans vn lac qui contient quelques cent cinquante lieuës de long, & quelques quatre ou cinq lieuës à l'entrée dudit lac, il y a vne riviere qui va aux *Algoumequins* vers le Nort: Et vne autre qui va aux *Jroquois*, par où leſdits *Algoumequins & Iroquois* ſe font la guerre Et vn peu plus haut à la bẽde du Su dudit lac, il y a vne autre riviere qui va au *Jroquois:* puis venant à la fin dudit lac, ilz rencontrent vn autre faut où, ilz portent leurs canots: de là ils entrent dedans vn autre tres-grand lac, qui peut contenir autant comme le premier. Ilz n'ont eſté que fort peu dãs ce dernier, & ont ouy dire qu'à la fin dudit lac il y a vne mer, dõt ilz n'ôt veu la fin, ne ouy dire qu'aucun l'ait veuë. Mais que là où ils ont eſté, l'eau n'eſt point mauvaiſe, d'autãt qu'ilz n'ont point avancé plus haut, & que le cours de l'eau vient du côté du Soleil couchant venant à l'Orient, & ne ſçavent ſi paſſé ledit lac qu'ils ont veu, il y a autre cours d'eau qui aille du côté de l'Occident: que le Soleil ſe couche à main droite dudit lac, qui eſt ſelon mon iugement au Noroüeſt , peu plus ou moins, & qu'au premier lac l'eau ne gele point, ce qui fait iuger que le temps y eſt temperé."

Now compare with the above Champlain's "Des Sauvages" in Chapter IX., Vol. II., pages 45 and 46, where he narrates what "two or three Algonquins told him."

"Puis viennent dedans vn lac qui contient quelque cent cinquante lieuës de long; & quelques quatre ou cinq lieuës à l'entrée dudict lac, il y a vne riuiere qui va aux Algoumequins vers le Nort, & vne autre qui va aux Irocois; par où leſdict Algoumequins & Irocois ſe font la guerre. Et vn peu plus haut à la bande du Su dudict lac, il y a vne autre riuiere qui va aux Irocois; puis venant à la fin dudict lac, ils rencontrent vn autre fault, où ils portent leurs canots; delà ils entrent dedans vn autre trés grand lac, qui peut contenir autant comme le premier. Ils n'y ont eſté que fort peu dans ce dernier, & ont ouy dire qu'à la fin dudict lac, il y a vne mer dont ils n'ont veu la fin, ne ouy dire qu'aucun l'aye veu; mais que là où ils ont eſté, l'eau n'eſt point mauuaiſe, d'autant qu'ils n'ont point aduancé plus haut; & que le cours de l'eau vient du coſté du ſoleil couchant venant à l'Orient, & ne ſçauent ſi paſſé le dits lacs qu'ils ont veu il y a autre cours d'eau qui aille du coſté de l'Occident; que le ſoleil ſe couche à main droite dudict lac, qui eſt, ſelon mon iugement, au Noroueſt peu plus ou moins; & qu'au premier lac l'eau ne gelle point, ce qui me fait iuger que le temps y eſt temperé.

La riviére Trent et la baie de Quinté

La riviére Noire

La riviére Oswego

Niagara Falls

Translation of the two quotations above, both being the same, from Publications of the Prince Society, Champlain's Voyages, Boston, Vol. I., page 274.

"Then they enter a lake ſome hundred and fifty leagues in length, and ſome four or five leagues from the entrance of this lake there is a river extending northward to the Algonquins, and another towards the Iroquois where the ſaid Algonquins and the Iroquois make war upon each other. And a little farther along, on the ſouth ſhore of this lake, there is another river, extending towards the Iroquois; then,

The River-like Bay of Quinté

Oſwego River

The Geneſee River

Niagara Falls

after which they come to Niagara Falls

arriving at the end of this lake, they come to another fall, where they carry their canoes; beyond this, they enter another very large lake as long, perhaps, as the firſt. The latter they have viſited but very little, they ſaid, and have heard that, at the end of it, there is a ſea of which they have not ſeen the end, nor heard that any one has, but that the water at the point to which they have gone is not ſalt, but that they are not able to judge of the water beyond, ſince they have not advanced any farther; that the courſe of the water is from the weſt towards the eaſt, and that they do not know whether, beyond the lakes they have ſeen, there is another watercourſe towards the weſt; that the ſun ſets on the right of this lake; that is, in my judgment, northweſt more or leſs; and that, at the firſt lake the water never freezes, which leads me to conclude that the weather there is moderate."

The Indians called Lake Huron "Mer douce"

We can eaſily recognize Lake Ontario, Lake Erie and Niagara Falls although this account is exceedingly confuſed and inaccurate

Quotation No. 3

Lescarbot in Chapter XXI. page 383, in narrating "what a young Algonquin who has voyaged much on this great lake" related, says:

Grandſime lac de trois cẽts lieües

"De là ils entrent dedans vn grandiſſime lac, qui peut contenir quelques trois cẽts lieuës de long. Avançant quelques cent lieües dedans ledict lac, ils rencontrent vne ile qui eſt fort grande, où au delà de ladicte ile, l'eau eſt ſalubre; mais que paſsãt quelques cẽts lieües plus auant, l'eau eſt encore plus mauvaiſe: Arrivant à la fin dudit lac, l'eau eſt du tout ſalée: Qu'il y a vn ſaut qui peut contenir vne lieüe de large, d'où il deſcend vn grandiſſime courant d'eau dans ledit lac. Que paſſé ce ſaut, on ne voit plus de terre, ny d'vn cóté ne d'autre, ſinõ vne mer ſi grãde qu'ils n'en ont point veu la fin, ni ouï dire qu'aucun l'ait veuë: Que le Soleil ſe couche à main droite dudit lac, & qu'à ſon entree il y a vne riviere qui va aux *Algoumequins* & l'autre aux *Jroquois*, par où ilz ſe font la guerre."

Niagara Falls

Saut

Riviere des Algoumequins au grand lac

Now compare what Champlain in "Des Sauvages," Chapter IX., Vol. II., page 47, narrating "what a young Algonquin who had voyaged far on this great lake" told him, says:

"Delà ils entrent dedans vn grandiſſime lac qui peut contenir quelques trois cents lieuës de long. Aduançant quelque cent lieuës dedans ledict lac, ils rencontrent vne iſle, qui eſt fort grande, où, audelà de ladicte iſle, l'eau eſt ſalubre; mais que paſſant quelques cent lieuës plus auant, l'eau eſt encore plus mauuaiſe; arriuant à la fin dudict lac, l'eau eſt du tout ſalée. Qu'il y a vn ſault qui peut contenir vne lieuë de large, d' où il deſcend vn grandiſſime courant d'eau dans le dict lac; que paſſé ce ſault, on ne voit plus de terre ny d'vn coſté, ne d'autre, ſinon vne mer ſi grande qu'ils n'en n'ont point veu la fin, ny ouy dire qu'aucun l'aye veu. Que le ſoleil ſe couche à main droite dudict lac, & qu'à ſon entrée il y a vne riuiere qui va aux Algoumequins, & l'autre aux Irocois, par où ils ſe font la guerre."

Malgré les inexactitudes qui précedent, on ne peut s'empêcher de reconnaître ici la chute de Niagara

Niagara Falls

Translation of the two above quotations, both being the same, from Publications of the Prince Society, Champlain's Voyages, Boston, Vol. I. page 275 and 276.

"After this, they enter a very large lake, ſome three hundred leagues in length. Proceeding ſome hundred leagues in this lake, they come to a very large iſland, beyond which the water is good; but that, upon going ſome hundred leagues farther, the water has become ſomewhat bad, and, upon reaching the end of the lake it is perfectly ſalt. That there is a fall about a league wide, where a very large maſs of water falls into ſaid lake; that, when this fall is paſſed, one ſees no more land on either ſide, but only a ſea ſo large that they have never ſeen the end of it, nor heard that any one has; that the ſun ſets on the right of this lake, at the entrance to which there is a river extending towards the Algonquins, and another towards the Iroquois, by way of which they go to war."

Niagara Falls

"Mer douce" or Lake Huron

Lastly Lescarbot, on page 385, in Chapter XXII., and near the beginning thereof, after having quoted the entire preceding three chapters of his own book from Champlain, says:

Translation and Italics mine

> "We shall now relate what the said Captain Cartier tells generally of the wonders of this great river of Canada, also of the river Saguenay and of the river of the Iroquois, *in order to compare his account with that which the said Champlain wrote, from which we have quoted the foregoing accounts.*" [les paroles ci-dessus.]

Champlain never saw Niagara or he would not have quoted such erroneous descriptions of it as the Indians related to him, without adding where, according to his own observation, these were inaccurate. The unequivocal statement of Lescarbot just before he commences to quote Champlain, that he is going to do so, and his open statement of his having done so, just after the long quotation, cover and settle this whole question. If anything in the way of circumstantial proof were needed on this special point, the almost absolute identity of Lescarbot's descriptions of Niagara and our Lake Region, in 1609, with those of Champlain, which first appeared in 1604, furnishes it.

Cartier *may* have heard of the "grand saut" or Niagara from the Indians in 1535, but it is absolutely unlikely that he did so, for in his account of that voyage, published in 1545, he makes no reference, nor even a suggestion of one, to it; yet he does refer very briefly to the great lakes.

The geographical description is, not unnaturally, vague and confused

This is the earliest known reference to our Lake Region, where Cartier, relating "what Donnacona and others told him," says:

Tross' reprint, 1863, page 34

Translation mine

Probably Lake Superior

> "And beyond the said Saguenay, runs the above mentioned river, passing through two or three vast lakes, beyond which there is a sea of fresh water, but no one had ever been heard of who had seen the end thereof."

Translation mine

Lescarbot also gives the above on page 391 of his work and adds the note "Compare what Sieur Châplein says above, Chapters 8 and 9."

By the way, this work of Cartier's, of which the title is quoted on page 5 of this pamphlet, was the first printed book relating solely to Canada; so in it he evidently meant to tell everything he knew, and everything he had heard, about that country, of which he was the first explorer.

Champlain *did* hear of "vn sault, entre deux lacs," or Niagara, and gives not only one but three different accounts of it that he heard, in 1603, from the Indians; and the passages from Champlain's "Des Sauvages" above quoted are, in point of time, the second, but as regards details, the earliest known accounts of our great Lake Region; making that book almost as valuable historically as it is rare commercially.

And so: from the brave and adventurous Cartier, to whom it has been erroneously accorded, we must wrest the honor of being the first man in literature to refer to Niagara Falls; and we must award it, nearly 70 years after Cartier's book appeared, to the subsequent Founder of Quebec and the First Governor of New France,—the man who is by far the most picturesque figure in all Canadian History—Samuel de Champlain.

IN THIS PAMPHLET:

The notes in the line outside of the body of the type are by the Author hereof. The notes in the line inside of the body of the type, and alongside the quotations, are by the author quoted.

Of this edition 160 were printed